

DRINKING WATER TREATMENT AND DISTRIBUTION OPERATOR CERTIFICATION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Q-1. Where can I get a copy of the operator certification regulations?

- A. The operator certification regulations are available on the Drinking Water Program's website. ([Click here](#))

Q-2. Who must be certified?

- A. All individuals who operate or supervise the operation of a drinking water treatment facility must possess a *water treatment operator certificate*.

An individual who makes decisions addressing the operational activities identified in Subsection 63770(b) must possess a *distribution operator certificate*.

An individual who makes decisions addressing the operational activities identified in Subsection 63770(c) must possess a distribution operator certificate or possess a treatment operator certificate and have appropriate training to make such decisions. An individual who makes decisions addressing the operational activities identified in Subsection 63770(d) must possess either a distribution operator certificate or a treatment operator certificate.

Q-3. How do I become certified?

- A. Under the regulations adopted in January 2001, becoming certified is a two-step process. An initial application and filing fee is submitted to participate in the examination. This application will be evaluated for the **educational** requirement. Once that application has been approved you will be allowed to take the examination.

If you are successful in passing the examination, you will have three years (from the date of the exam) to submit an application and obtain certification. You must submit a second application and filing fee for certification. This application will be evaluated for the **experience** portion of the requirement. If you fulfilled the experience requirement you will be issued a certificate; if you have not fulfilled the experience requirement your application will be held for a period of one year (from the date it was received in this office) in order for you to obtain the necessary experience.

Q-4. If I submit an application, for either examination or certification, and I do not meet the minimum qualifications (MQs), will I get a refund of my filing fee?

A. No. If you are unsure of the MQs for either taking an examination or becoming certified, please contact this office for clarification. Your application will not be evaluated over the telephone, but the analyst will explain the MQs clearly enough for you to make your own determination. *Please note: all education requirements must be fulfilled before you are allowed to take an examination; all experience requirements must be fulfilled before you are issued a certificate.*

Q-5. When the application requests verification of specialized training or verification of a college degree, what documentation must I submit?

A. A legible photocopy of either an **official** transcript (issued to you by the college) or certificate of completion must be submitted with your application. The documentation must indicate the name of the course and the number of units (or hours) you were awarded for successful completion of the course.

Q-6. If I have a Title I, ADA disability that allows me special testing accommodations, what documentation must I submit with my application to be allowed such accommodations?

A. A letter from a professional authorized to make such assessment must be submitted with your application. The documentation must state the impairment and exactly what special testing accommodation is required.

Q-7. What do the "Ts" and "Ds" mean on the operator certificate, distribution system classification, and treatment facility classification?

A. Either a "T" or a "D" now precedes all operator grades, as well as treatment facility classifications and distribution system classifications. A "T" prefix is used to indicate treatment and a "D" prefix is used to indicate distribution.

Q-8. If I am already certified as a water treatment operator, does that make me eligible to be certified as a distribution operator at the same level?

A. No. The treatment operator certification and distribution operator certification are independent of one another. Having one does not qualify an operator for the other. As an example, a T3 treatment operator may only meet the requirements for a D1 or D2 distribution certificate, and vice versa.

Q-9. At what grade must an operator be certified?

- A. If an operator has been designated by the water supplier as the Chief Operator or Shift Operator, the operator must be certified at the level specified by the following table. Operators that have not been designated as Chief or Shift Operator may be certified at any grade.

Treatment/Distribution Classification	Min. Certification of Chief Operator	Min Certification of Shift Operator
T1/D1	T1/D1	T1/D1
T2/D2	T2/D2	T1/D1
T3/D3	T3/D3	T2/D2
T4/D4	T4/D4	T3/D3
T5/D5	T5/D5	T3/D3

Q-10. If a water distribution system or treatment facility has only one Chief Operator, can that operator ever go on vacation?

- A. The regulation specifies the following requirements: each distribution system and treatment facility must designate (1) at least one Chief Operator for each system or facility, and (2) at least one Shift Operator for each operating shift.

In addition, the regulation requires that either the Chief or Shift Operator must be available as specified. The regulation does not require both the Chief and Shift Operator to be available. However, it is important to keep in mind that the Chief Operator is the individual who has overall responsibility for the operation of the distribution system or treatment facility and, therefore, it is the Chief Operator's decision to determine whether or not a Chief Operator should be available at all times and whether or not the Chief Operator can be absent for a period of time without designating a replacement Chief Operator. If a replacement Chief Operator is designated, that operator must be certified at a level equal to or greater than the system or facility.

Q-11. If my certificate was revoked can I reapply for certification?

- A. If the certificate was revoked as the result of negligence or fraud the operator cannot reapply for certification unless the revoked certificate is reinstated. If the certificate was revoked because the operator failed to either pay the appropriate fees or to obtain the necessary continuing education credits the operator may reapply for certification.

Q-12. What water systems will need certified water treatment and distribution operators?

- A. As required by the existing law (Section 106885, Health and Safety Code), all public water systems that have water treatment facilities will require certified water treatment operators, except that water systems that only use disinfection facilities for groundwater, where no Giardia or virus reduction is required, can meet the operator certification requirements with a certified distribution operator. All community and nontransient noncommunity public water systems with or without water treatment facilities must have certified distribution operators.

Q-13. Do the regulations contain any provisions for operators in training?

- A. No. Operators that are new to the field are eligible for T1, T2, D1, or D2 certificates without having any operator experience. To obtain higher certifications, operators will need to have operator experience.

Q-14. If I lose my original certificate can I get a new one?

- A. Yes. You must send a written request to this office including your name, address, operator number, grade, and the reason for your request. Send this information along with check or money order in the amount of \$25, made out to the DHS-OCP.

Q-15. What are the operator certification requirements for a transient, non-community water system?

Type of Water Source	Type of Treatment	Type of Certification Required
Groundwater	None	None required
Groundwater	Chlorination	Distribution or Treatment
Groundwater	Other treatment	Treatment
Groundwater Under the Direct Influence of Surface Water	Chlorination/Filtration-disinfection	Treatment
Surface Water	Filtration and Disinfection	Treatment

EXAM REQUIREMENTS

Q-1. When are certification exams offered?

- A. Distribution exams are offered twice a year in April and October. The final filing date for the April exam is February 1 and the final filing date for the October exam is August 1.

Treatment exams are offered twice a year in May and November. The final filing date for the May exam is March 1 and the final filing date for the November exam is September 1.

Q-2. How do I know what to study for the examination?

- A. The document called *Expected Range of Knowledge* tells you for each grade level what can be on the exam. Also, under *Suggested Reading*, reference materials are suggested.

Q-3. What is considered acceptable specialized training to qualify for the examination?

- A. Specialized training means college level courses providing training in drinking water treatment or drinking water distribution offered by an accredited academic institution or an organization accredited by the International Association of Continuing Education Training (IACET).

Q-4. How do I know if a course I took will be acceptable as a specialized training course?

- A. You can see if the course you took is listed on our website under *Specialized Training Courses*. These are courses that have been reviewed and approved for specialized training. If it is not listed you can compare the course to the *Specialized Training Guidance* document to see if it qualifies.

Q-5. I have taken several short courses over the last year for continuing education that add up to 36 contact hours. Will that be acceptable as specialized training?

- A. No. A specialized training course must be a single course at least 3-units or 36 contact hours long.

Q-6. I will complete my specialized training course after the final filing date but before the exam. Can I use it to qualify for the current exam?

- A. No. All exam requirements must be met prior to the final filing date so that we may properly review your application. Any courses you complete after the final filing date will be reviewed for the next exam cycle.

Q-7. I have not completed any specialized training courses but I do have a college degree. Will my degree qualify me to take the exam?

- A. No. A college degree will not meet the specialized training requirement but some of the courses you took while obtaining your degree may qualify as specialized training. Compare your courses to the *Specialized Training Guidelines* available on our website.

Q-8. I took a specialized training course ten years ago. Will you accept that?

- A. Yes, as long as that course can be verified through the college and it meets the definition of specialized training.

Q-9. If I already used a course to get into the Grade 2 exam can I submit that course again for the Grade 3 exam?

- A. Yes. Once we have accepted your course for the purposes of meeting the exam

Q-10. Can I take an exam without having any operator experience?

- A. Yes. There are no experience requirements to take an exam. Experience is required to become certified at grade 3 and above for both water treatment and water distribution. You should review the certification experience requirements before you apply for an exam to make sure you can meet those qualifications.

Q-11. Can I skip the Grade 1 exam and take the Grade 2 exam instead?

- A. Yes, as long as you meet the grade 2 exam requirements.

Q-12. What do I need to bring with me to the examination?

- A.
1. The exam admittance card sent to you by this office
 2. Valid government-issued photo ID. Picture ID is mandatory for admittance into the exam. Acceptable forms of ID are driver's license, DMV non-driver ID, current U.S. passport, or military ID.
 3. Simple electronic calculator. No programmable calculators, calculators with an alpha keyboard, or calculators with tape print-out are allowed.
 4. A supply of sharpened No. 2 pencils with erasers.

Q-13. What happens if I arrive at the exam late?

- A. Doors normally open at the testing site at 12:00 p.m. and the exam starts promptly at 1:00 p.m. There will be no admittance into the examination after the proctor has begun giving the exam instructions. If you appear after the exam has started you will be given information on how to reschedule to the subsequent examination date.

RENEWAL AND CONTINUING EDUCATION (CE) REQUIREMENTS

Q-1. How will I know when it's time to renew my certificate?

- A. The Department will send a courtesy renewal notice to the operator when it is time to renew the certificate. However, it is ultimately the operator's responsibility to keep track of the certificate's expiration date and to submit the renewal application during the appropriate time frame. It is also the responsibility of the operator to notify the Department within 60 days of any change in address or name (section 63840(a)).

Q-2. How much continuing education is required to renew my certificate and when must I get it?

- A. Water treatment and distribution certificates must be renewed every three years and obtaining CE contact hours is a requirement for renewal. The number of hours depends on the level of certification. These contact hours must be obtained between your renewal dates.

<u>Certificate Grade</u>	<u>Contact Hours Required</u>
T1 or D1	12
T2 or D2	16
T3 or D3	24
T4 or D4	36
T5 or D5	36

Q-3. Does safety training count towards the CE requirement?

- A. Operators may fulfill up to 25 percent of the required contact hours with safety training.

Q-4. How will I know whether or not the training I want to take will be acceptable?

- A. The subject matter must be specific to drinking water treatment or distribution, at least one hour long, and the department must be able to verify the contact hours through the CE Provider.

Q-5. What evidence should I keep in my records to prove that I've completed the required number of CE contact hours?

- A. You should keep a copy of the certificate of completion, course syllabus or outline, record of the course title, CE Provider, contact number, location of the course, number of contact hours, and the date it was completed. You will be required to submit this information with your renewal application.

Q-6. How many CE contact hours are college semester units worth?

- A. One CE Unit is equal to 10 contact hours and a 3 unit college course is equal to 45 contact hours.

Q-7. What must a water utility do to offer CE contact hours that are verifiable?

- A
1. Arrange for someone to conduct a training class on a subject specific to drinking water treatment or distribution
 2. Track attendance with a sign-in/sign-out sheet during the class.
 3. Archive the following information for verification purposes:
 - Title of course
 - Instructor
 - Sign-in/sign-out sheet
 - Number of contact hours offered
 - Training material or hand-outs (an explanation of the subject matter)
 - Location of training
 - Date of training
 - Contact information of CE Provider. (This could be anybody in the water utility that has access to the archived file.)
 4. Provide the above-mentioned information to each operator who attended the training. The operator will relay this information to the department during renewal. The department may contact the CE provider to verify the course.

Q-8. How does the Operator Certification Unit verify contact hours?

- A. We use the information provided to us by the operator to contact the CE provider. The CE provider must be able to tell us what subject matter was taught, when and where the operator attended the course, and how many contact hours were provided. An operator cannot verify his or her own attendance.

Q-9. What will happen if I do not have enough contact hours to meet the renewal requirements?

- A. Your certificate will be suspended on the expiration date. The suspension will last for six months during which you can re-activate the certificate by paying any late fees and submitting the required number of contact hours. If you have not re-activated your certificate within that six month period it will be revoked. A revoked certificate cannot be re-activated.

Q-10. Can I work as a certified operator if my certificate is revoked or expired?

A. No.

QUESTIONS SUPPLIERS MAY ASK

Q-1. How will I know what my treatment and distribution system classifications are?

A. The Drinking Water Field Operations Branch (DWFOB) will classify treatment facilities and distribution systems. Sections 64413.1 and 64412.3 of the regulations provide very specific classification criteria. If you have any questions you should contact your DWFOB field office.

Q-2. If the water supplier hires a contractor to do work on the distribution system, does the contractor need to be certified?

A. If they make any decisions addressing the operational activities specified in Section 63770 they must be certified.

Q-3. Does a distribution operator who has been designated as the emergency standby person need to be certified?

A. If the person is only a designated contact, and they in-turn contact a certified distribution operator without making any decisions addressing the operational activities specified in Section 63770, they do not need to be certified. However, the supplier does need to have a certified operator available to respond to emergencies.

Q-4. Does a certified distribution operator need to be on-site?

A. Only if it is necessary to be on-site to make decisions addressing the operational activities specified in Section 63770. If the certified operator can make an informed decision based only on information received over the telephone, or by other means, without actually being on-site to gather the information, then that operator does not need to be on-site.

Q-5. Does a water system that provides only disinfected groundwater need to employ a certified treatment operator?

A. If the treatment facility is not required to provide Giardia or virus inactivation pursuant to Section 64654(a), a certified treatment operator is not required. However, a certified distribution operator is required. Additionally, if the DWFOB determines that site-specific circumstances warrant the use of a certified treatment operator, that requirement can be made a condition of the water system permit.

Q-6. If new tract homes are being constructed and a contractor is building the sewer and water systems, does that contractor need to be certified as a distribution operator?

A. Probably not. The new construction is not a water distribution system until it is connected to the water supply and, therefore, the contractor is not required to be a certified distribution operator. The water supplier is responsible for the new system when it is connected to the existing distribution system. A certified distribution operator must make the decision that the new system is connected properly and has been appropriately tested.

Q-7. If we are a small system and we have only one certified operator, how can that operator ever go on vacation?

A. You can develop a partnership with other nearby water suppliers that would provide coverage of your system during times when your operator is on vacation.

Q-8. Can a single operator serve as the Chief Operator for both the distribution system and the water treatment facility?

A. Yes, as long as the operator is certified at the appropriate level for both treatment and distribution, the operator may serve as the Chief Operator for both.

Q-9. If the local fire department is responsible for maintaining fire hydrants in the distribution system, must their personnel be certified in order to flush the hydrants?

A. If the fire department is simply "exercising" the hydrants and the fire department isn't administering an intentional distribution system flushing program, certification would not be necessary. However, the water system should be aware that such flushing of hydrants can cause water quality problems and may wish to restrict or closely supervise such activities.

Q-10. As the owner of a mobile home park that provides well water, must I obtain a distribution operator certificate?

A. No, you do not need to have a distribution operator certificate simply because you own the system. However, as the water supplier, you must designate at least one Chief Operator for the system, and that operator must have the appropriate certification (Section 64413.7(a)). You may designate yourself, in which case you would need to be certified, or you may hire or contract with an appropriately certified operator.

INTERIM DISTRIBUTION OPERATOR CERTIFICATION

Q-1. What is interim distribution operator certification?

- A. Interim distribution certificates were a tool to help operators and suppliers comply with the new distribution operator certification requirements during the first 3 to 6 years that the regulations were in effect. The Department issued interim water distribution certificates to those people designated as water distribution operators by their water systems. These certificates were valid for three years and could be renewed once for an additional three years. All interim certificates will expire on January 1st, 2007.

Q-2. If the water system I work for obtained an interim operator certificate for me, may I use that certificate to work as a certified operator for a different water system?

- A. No. Interim certificates cannot be transferred to different water suppliers. If you intend to work for a different water supplier as a certified operator, you will need to obtain a regular distribution certificate.

Q-3. If I have a D5 interim certificate and I want to obtain a regular distribution operator certificate, am I obligated to apply for the D5 grade or may apply for a lesser grade?

- A. You may apply for whatever grade you want, as long as you meet the minimum qualifications.

Q-4. If I have an interim certificate what must I do to obtain a regular certificate?

- A. An operator with an interim certificate must meet the qualifications for examination and pass the exam. After passing the exam and obtaining the necessary operator experience (experience gained as a certified interim operator counts as experience as a certified operator), the operator must apply for certification to receive a certificate.

Q-5. I have an interim D5 certificate and currently serve as the Chief Operator for a D5 distribution system. I do not do well on tests and would like to take the D3 exam instead of the D5 exam. Can I do this, and if I do, does this jeopardize my interim D5 certificate?

- A. You may take an exam and apply for certification at any grade equal to or less than the interim grade you have. Obtaining a lesser certificate does not jeopardize your interim certificate. You may continue to operate under the interim certificate until it expires, regardless of whether or not you have obtained a regular certificate. However, if you have not obtained a regular D5

certificate by the time your interim D5 certificate expires, you will no longer be able to serve as a Chief Operator for a D5 distribution system.

CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

Q-1. Why do I have to fill out another application for certification after I already filled out the exam application?

A. The exam application and certification application require different information. The exam requirements are related to your education and certification requirements are based on your experience.

Q-2. I passed the T3 exam but do not have experience as a T3 operator what are my options?

A. You can apply for certification as a T2 operator. If you are able to meet the T3 experience requirements within three years of passing the exam you can then apply for T3 certification.

Q-3. I supervise a crew of six distribution operators who perform water distribution duties. Do I get experience credit for supervising this crew?

A. Not for simply supervising the actions of others. The regulation defines operator experience in the following way. "Operator experience" means the daily performance of activities consisting of the control or oversight of any process or operation at a water treatment facility or in a distribution system that may affect the quality or quantity of water". Control or oversight of distribution operators is not the same as having control or oversight of a process or operation in a distribution system. The processes or operations referred to in the definition are those processes that require distribution certification such as installing, tapping, disinfecting, flushing and connecting water mains.

Q-4. I design water systems on a CAD. Is that considered water distribution experience?

A. No. You do not need to be certified to design a water system so no experience credit is given.

Q-5. In my job I perform both water treatment and distribution duties. How will you determine my distribution experience?

A. Many operators perform both water treatment and water distribution duties. The analyst will request a letter from your immediate supervisor or Chief Operator to determine how much time you spend performing each function.

Q-6. What if I don't agree with your determination of my experience?

- A. If you would like to appeal the decision of the analyst you can send a request to us in writing. We will forward your request and file to the Chief of Drinking Water Technical Operations for review.

Q-7. What information is required for you to review my experience?

- A. In order for us to evaluate your experience, you need to send us your utility's official job description and organizational chart. If this does not clearly indicate that your position is either a water treatment or water distribution operator we may request that your immediate supervisor or Chief Operator send us a letter outlining your daily duties as they relate to water treatment or distribution. If you feel your job description does not adequately describe your job duties you can send in this letter with your original application.

* * * * *

For more information about Drinking Water Treatment and Distribution
Operator Certification,
please call the Certification Unit.
Return to Drinking Water Treatment and Operator Certification
Return to DDWEM